

# No Escape

Natasha Cooper

Published by Pocket Books

Extract

All text is copyright of the author

This opening extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.  
Please print off and read at your leisure.

---

First published in Great Britain by Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, 2009  
A CBS Company

Copyright © N J Cooper, 2009

This book is copyright under the Berne Convention.

No reproduction without permission.

® and © 1997 Simon & Schuster Inc. All rights reserved.

The right of N J Cooper to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Simon & Schuster UK Ltd  
1st Floor  
222 Gray's Inn Road  
London  
WC1X 8HB

[www.simonsays.co.uk](http://www.simonsays.co.uk)

Simon & Schuster Australia  
Sydney

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-84737-414-1

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either a product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual people, living or dead, events or locales, is entirely coincidental.

Typeset by  
Printed and bound in Great Britain by

## Prologue

Dan lay back on the rug and let the August sun warm his face. His left hand idly stroked the sheep-cropped grass of Chillerton Down, near the old chalk pit, while his right became a plaything for his eighteen-month-old son. The sensations of gummy bite and sticky dribble on his fingers added an unlikely charm to this perfect day.

‘I’ve got your picture, Daddy. I’ve got your picture.’

Dan opened his eyes to smile up into his daughter’s face. Foreshortened like this, it had the plump sweetness of some putto on the ceiling of a Tuscan church.

‘Let Daddy sleep, Anna,’ said Izzie. There was the cosy sound of amusement in her voice. ‘He’s worn out with eating so many chocolate biscuits.’

Dan switched his attention from the squashed oval of his daughter’s face to the long bony perfection of his wife’s. The mixture of mockery and protectiveness in her eyes was so much part of her that he wanted to reach up and pull her towards him, as though they were in bed.

‘Where would I be without you?’ he said.

‘Locked to your desk by obsession, duty, and unspeakably awful ambition,’ she said, pushing some of the soft dark hair away from her face.

‘I’ve got your picture, ladybird. I’ve got your picture,’ chanted Anna, clicking madly at the camera as she stared towards the ground.

‘Your sister has a lot to answer for, Izzie.’ Dan pointed a lazy finger towards the budding Cartier-Bresson, who was now dancing away towards the trees at the edge of the field. Her pink dress dwindled to a single bright spot in the centre of his fuzzy vision. ‘Just because she didn’t want her camera any more, that’s no reason to turn our life into a perpetual slide show.’

Izzie screwed the top on the old honey jar that had held vinaigrette, raising one finger to suck the gleaming gold oil drops off it.

‘Anna will be bored within a couple of days and forget it. Just as she’s forgotten to look for the fossils we came here for. I suppose we should be thankful it’s a digital camera and we’re not faced with paying to get film developed. This way if she does manage a shot without putting her thumb in front of the lens we can save it and tactfully delete the rest.’

‘We could even print the odd one,’ Dan said, regaining his fingers from his son, who promptly rose to his feet and performed his latest trick of flinging his now considerable weight straight down onto Dan’s diaphragm. ‘Ough! Family life.’

Izzie had finished packing up the picnic and scooped Jake away, tucking him between her arm and ribs.

‘You love it,’ she said, looking down. ‘Is your gut OK?’

‘Sure.’ Dan prodded himself experimentally, then added: ‘At least it will be once I’ve recovered from major surgery to my abdominals and had a year or so of physio.’

‘Wimp!’ Izzie kissed her fingers and bent forward to lay them briefly on his forehead.

He was impressed by her ability to hold their squirming toddler under her arm without breaking a sweat, or interrupting anything else she might want to do. But then she’d always managed the superhuman trick of making motherhood look as though it were an enchanting sideline to an easy life. He couldn’t imagine existing without her now.

‘Where’s Anna?’ she said, her voice sounding as near sharp as it ever did.

‘Photographing worms and midges I should think,’ he said, pushing himself up onto one elbow to look in the direction their daughter had taken.

A shot sounded in the trees, cracking through the warm air.

‘Anna!’ Izzie dumped Jake on the rug and ran towards the straggly copse at the end of the field.

‘It’ll only be someone after rabbits,’ Dan called after her, surprised by the overreaction.

Another shot smashed through the still laziness of the afternoon. It sounded even nearer. He listened. There were birds, and the buzzing chuntering background sounds of any bit of empty countryside. But there were no voices.

In the calm after the shots, the lack of human noise spooked him. He was on his feet in seconds, picking up Jake and feeling for his phone with his free hand, even as he, too, ran towards the copse, shouting his wife’s name and his daughter’s.

His own panting was so loud and his heart was banging so hard in his chest and Jake was crying so loudly that it was far too long before he noticed the sound of heavy, trampling feet coming through the edge of the scrubby little wood ahead of him.

He dumped Jake on the ground and forced his phone out of his pocket. His fingers seemed to have swollen and sweat made them slip off the tiny keys. He swore and cancelled the first attempt at 999, then tried again.

‘Daddy! Daddy! Monster!’ Jake was tottering on his feet, one hand clamped to Dan’s trousers, and pointing.

Dan followed the line of Jake’s finger and saw a truly monstrous figure in a tattered brown overcoat that came nearly to its feet. A tight black woollen balaclava covered its face, with ragged holes cut for the eyes. Unbelievably it held out a short stubby shotgun between its gloved paws. The two-eyed barrel was absolutely steady.

‘Who are you?’ Dan said, just as something ferociously heavy hit him in the chest.

Boiling heat drove tracks all through his body. As his knees buckled, he turned to shield his son and fell. The last sight he had was of the rough edges of the gun barrels pointing past his face straight into Jake’s eyes.

## Chapter 1

Ping. Ping. Ping.

Rain fell from the loft under the leaky shingle roof to hit the base of the bowls Karen had arranged all over the kitchen floor when she'd arrived late yesterday afternoon. Confronted then with fast-spreading puddles, she'd remembered the chipped enamel bowls at once and found them at the bottom of the kitchen's only cupboard without even thinking about it.

What she hadn't remembered through the eighteen years of absence was the shabbiness of this small holiday chalet on the unfashionable side of the Isle of Wight. Her last sight of it had been through a fog of tears at the age of fifteen, when she'd come to the Island for her beloved grandmother's funeral.

Ping.

Granny had once used these same bowls to catch similar drips until the roof had been replaced two years before her death. Karen hadn't expected it to need doing again so soon.

Ping.

She braced herself for the next drop, rather as she'd once braced herself for each new bout of her husband's snoring. There'd been a hideous pattern to it: seven snores rising in pitch and intensity until they'd peaked in one tremendous snort, before stopping for at least two minutes. At first she'd lain beside Peter, silently screaming with frustration. Later in their five-year battle of a marriage, she'd often sat up to watch his sweaty, stubbly face and thought about putting a pillow over his nose and mouth and leaning on it until he was dead.

Ping. Ping. Ping.

A distant bellow interrupted the drops' rhythm and her worst memories. This was a trumpeting kind of sound she'd been warned to expect whenever the rain was especially heavy.

Her nearest neighbour in these weird and muddy woods apparently believed he was descended from elephants and liked to greet the rain with a triumphal roar. According to local gossip, he'd been sent to live here decades ago, when his family had finally admitted they found him too embarrassing to keep with them on the expensive side of the Island.

Ping.

'He's utterly benign,' Jan Davies, the most ordinary of the few other neighbours, had told Karen yesterday. 'Got a fantastic memory, a wrinkled kind of skin that looks too big for his body, even though that's fat enough, and this habit of trumpeting in the rain. He won't bother you in any other way.'

Ping. Ping.

Now the noise of the drips made Karen think of war films, with tense young men using sonar to listen out for enemy submarines and the torpedoes that could kill them in seconds.

She turned back to her laptop and the email she was composing to her boyfriend to stop herself thinking too much about the very different sorts of danger she was facing. The chalet had no broadband – it didn't even have a phone line – but she could save the text on a memory stick and take it with her to the nearest Internet cafe on her way back from the prison tomorrow.

Talking to Will, even at several removes like this, always cheered her up. Sometimes it was better doing it at several removes because she could include all the things she would never actually tell him, whole paragraphs she could delete before sending the email. She typed:

I keep reminding myself, that in my family we don't make mistakes. Ever. Sometimes our plans 'just don't work out'. But that just opens the way to new plans and new achievements.

Trouble is, the reminding doesn't always work. If I were to list all the things I've got wrong, apart (maybe) from coming back here, they'd look like this.

'Fuck it,' she said aloud, determined to be more positive. 'Don't be pathetic.'

She grabbed her phone and drove halfway up the road that led out of the woods, to the point where she could make and receive calls. She pressed the speed dial for Will's mobile.

'Hi,' she said when he answered. 'You busy?'

'Never too busy to talk to you,' he said, and she could tell he was smiling from the sound of his voice. 'How is it?'

'Grim. Dank. Full of memories I don't need right now.' She thought of adding: so I wanted to talk to my resilient, untouchable, unworryable, brilliant bloke. 'How was today's list?'

Will was a neurosurgeon at Brighton Hospital, with a long queue of patients waiting for his skills.

'Fine. Nothing too hard. But we've got a five-year-old whose glioma isn't going to be safely accessible. I've got to talk to the parents tomorrow to tell them why we won't operate.'

'Awful!' Karen said, knowing she'd find that kind of encounter impossibly hard. 'For them and for you do.'

'Part of the job. Easier in some ways than interviewing murderous psychopaths in prison like you do.'

'Maybe. Are you going to be able to get away at the weekend and see my eccentric refuge? I should warn you there's nothing here but the kitchen/living room, a couple of small bedrooms and a ramshackle shower.'

'I hope I can make it,' he said, and the smile was back in his voice. 'I'll let you know for certain as soon as I can.'

'Great. And I hope I'll have found a way to fix the leaking roof by the time you come. Otherwise you'll be falling over bowls full of rainwater.'

'Don't let the leaks distract you.' His voice was still light, but there was an unmistakable note of authority in it, which she didn't like at all. They'd been together for three months now and just occasionally he seemed to forget that she wasn't one of the junior doctors on his team. 'They don't matter and your work does.'

'But you don't believe in my work,' she said, hoping she sounded confidently amused.

'That's not fair. I don't myself see how you could ever find enough evidence of the formation and causes of Dangerous Severe Personality Disorder from interviewing any number of individuals, however psychopathic, to come up with an incontrovertible diagnostic test, but ...'

Will paused in his measured counter-attack for long enough to make her understand that sometimes cool rationality could be even more irritating than thoughtless prejudice and shouting. She still didn't know why she found him so irresistible, when his unshakeable self-control, long sinewy torso and short spiky blond hair made him so completely different from every other man she'd ever fancied.

'But,' he went on, 'that doesn't mean I don't think it's worth the attempt. Or that any other psychologist, forensic or otherwise, could do any better. You're as good as they come, Karen.'

'Aaah,' she said, forgiving him. 'You do know how to make a girl feel good about herself. I'd better go, Will. Sleep well.'

'I always do. Take care. Bye.'

She sat in the car, holding the hard little phone and thinking of all the differences in the way she and Will approached their work.

For him, the brain was a collection of differently shaped masses with the texture of very lightly scrambled egg, a neat arrangement of regions named by ancient scholars and surgical explorers: the hippocampus they thought looked like a sea horse; the amygdala, so called because it was almond-shaped; the corpus collosum; the cerebellum; the ganglia; all clustered around the brain stem that reached down into the spine and ordered movement, thought, speech and behaviour by electrical impulses; each part of the whole subject to lesions and disease and tumours that his scalpel might be able to excise and correct.

For her, in spite of what she knew about its physical characteristics, the brain was a mass of anguish and delight, container of memories of punishment and despair, generator of impulses to excitement, awe, dread, hope and terror; and occasionally a terrifying labyrinth, in whose dark heart lurked a monster that had to be found, named and, with luck and courage, slain. Or at least neutralized.

Realizing that she'd spent at least five minutes staring at the raindrops that were chasing each other down her windscreen, she put away the phone and drove on to the junction with the main road, where there was enough room to turn the car and so get it back to its little parking space outside the chalet.

As soon as she opened the door, she realized the pings had stopped. Inside she saw why: water was now cascading over the edges of the enamel bowls. They'd have to be emptied before the floor was flooded all over again. And she'd better climb up into the roof space to empty the deeper buckets she'd put up there. This rain might go on all night.

After that, she'd have to make serious plans for tomorrow's trip to Parkhurst Prison and her first encounter with Spike Falconer, who had blasted a husband, wife and two small children to death with a shotgun at point-blank range for absolutely no reason anyone had yet been able to establish.